

Old Madison Co. Court House
Huntsville, Alabama
Madison Co.

HABS No. ALA-⁴³⁷~~23~~

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DISTRICT NO. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer
Auburn, Alabama

MADISON COUNTY COURT HOUSE
Huntsville, Madison County, Alabama.

Ownership:

~~Present~~ Owner: Madison County.

Architect:

George Steele.

Builder:

Builder unknown; George Steele
supervising architect.

Date of Erection: 1835 - 1840.

Present Condition: Razed in 1914; The drawings and
photographs presented are through the courtesy of,
Mr. E. L. Love, Architect, of Huntsville, Alabama,
who thoughtfully preserved measurements and photo-
graphs of this old court house, when it was razed
to make way for a modern structure.

Number of Stories: Two and a basement.

Materials of Construction: Brick made by hand on a
nearby lot. The stone came from surrounding -
mountains, lumber hand hewn or whip sawed, lime
burned in local kilns, and slaked in great pits
one year before using.

Other Existing Records: The Department of Archives
and History, at the Capitol, Montgomery, Alabama.
Has a photograph of the Madison County Court House,
dated, 1860. by, Collins, Photographer. Also
a post card by, M. Murray, Huntsville, Alabama.

Additional Data: The following is a copy of the information presented on cover sheet of drawings:

The drawings here presented of the Old Madison County Court House, are redrawn from measured drawings of the old building and provide more room by the addition of "T" wings on their side. This idea was later abandoned and in 1914 the old building was razed and a new one erected in its place.

In 1835 the county commissioners engaged George Steele to prepare plans for a new court house. In 1836 bids were advertised for, and early in 1837, a contract was let, with George Steele, as supervising architect, and the building finally complete in 1840.

In Betts "Early History of Huntsville" we quote the following: "The graceful lines and enduring architecture of the old court house, conceived after the Parthenon, was a monument to the skill of George Steele, a local architect. The brick were made by hand on a nearby lot, and the stone came from surrounding mountains. The lumber required was cut from local forests, and well seasoned before using, the same being hand hewed or whip sawed. The lime was burned in local kilns and slaked in great pits one year before using."

In 1906 in collecting materials for a magazine article, the Hon. Ben. P. Hunt, a lawyer and civic leader, was asked for data on the old court house, and he wrote the following: "The Madison County Court House" The very name suggests and recalls the stormy periods before, during, and after the civil war. It stands today a dignified and probably the best example of the Grecian Doric Architecture in the entire South; In its historic circuit room many southern and national celebrities have made their maiden speeches, and there has been heard the thundering eloquence of the Clays, Yancey, King, Clemens, the Walkers, Prentiss, and others of equal fame. During the civil war Huntsville witnessed continuous change from the occupation of Federal and Confederate troops. It suffered from the passage back and forth of both armies, who in turn used the court house as their - headquarters.

After the war it was the seat of

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Additional Data: cont'd.

the Infamous Carpet Bag government for North Alabama, when the negroes voted and the white man looked on. Then in 1868 the "Invisible Empire" of the Ku Klux Klan appeared on the scene and were wont to parade around the square with flowing robes and on horses with muffled hoofs and measured treads, they struck terror into all evil-doers, till by 1870, the white men of the south came into their own again."

Let it be said to the credit of the Federal Troops, and the Carpet Bag Government, that they inflicted no serious damage to the court house building, and it stood without any structural defects when it was razed in 1914.

Source of Material: Mr. E. L. Love, Architect.
Huntsville, Alabama.
Betts. "Early History of Huntsville".
Hon. Ben P. Hunt, Lawyer.
Huntsville, Alabama.
Mr. Peter Brannon, Dept. Archives & History.
Montgomery, Alabama.

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